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RECENT ACCESSIONS

STAFFORDSHIRE WARE.—Through the bequest of Mrs. May Leask, the Museum has recently received an excellent collection of blue and white Staffordshire plates. Although few in number, they exemplify the best work in this branch of the ceramic art, each piece showing the most careful printing of the design and a beauty and evenness of color that is rarely found. The makers represented are Wood, Clews, Ridgeway, and Stubbs, and the subjects include historical scenes and "picturesque views" of the more familiar sort. It is, however, the unusually fine quality of Mrs. Leask's collection that will commend it to the enthusiast and collector, and that makes it such a valuable addition to the collections of Anglo-American ceramics which the Museum already has.

A CHINESE POTTERY FIGURE.—The good-natured, pleasant little person who has been presented to the Museum by Mr. C. T. Loo is, I am afraid, a very disreputable character. He has, in fact, under his special patronage the opium smokers, and though in his earlier days he was no doubt one of the so-called Gods of Luck and may have been Mahākāla with the long white beard, he has got in very bad company indeed and now looks on good-naturedly with half-closed, sleepy eyes, stroking his long beard, while his followers seek golden dreams in the use of the dangerous drug.

The pottery figure is of hard fired reddish

clay, unglazed, which has been covered with a coat of white and painted in parts, and dates from the Ming period. The expression is amusing and lifelike; the figure shows Chinese sculpture not at its height but still in a strong period.

S. C. B. R.

NEAR EASTERN CERAMICS.—Several additions to the collection of Near Eastern

ceramics are in the Accessions Room for the present month. Of chief importance is a Persian bowl from Rhages, dating to the eleventh century. This piece was excavated from the mounds which mark the site of this once flourishing city, destroyed by the hordes of Genghis Khan in the later years of the thirteenth century. Systematic excavations have recently



BOWL FROM RHAGES
PERSIAN, XI CENTURY

shown evidences of a brilliant civilization extending for many centuries anterior to its destruction, and the Museum is fortunate in acquiring an example which shows Rhages ceramic art at the height of this development, and which ranks with the finest pieces in any public or private collection. The bowl is characteristic of one type of Rhages work which up to the present time has not been so excellently represented in our collection. Beautifully and thinly potted, the design in brown lustre is painted upon a white slip which is entirely covered with a thin transparent glaze. In design the bowl is thought to be unique in Persian ceramic art, as no other representation of the winged horse has as yet been brought to light. The piece is unusual as well in fineness of drawing and the

subtle play of line in arabesque and figure of the central medallion.

Of interest to the student are the six pieces of unglazed pottery, ornamented in incised decoration and low relief, produced by impression on the wet clay with an intaglio mould. The details are those found on Sassanian coins. These vases and jugs were excavated from a site on the border of what is now Persia, and, dating from the sixth to the ninth century, show the elements of Post-Sassanian art from which the later Persian art developed. They are of interest especially from this standpoint and will be of value for the study collection.

W. M. M.



SACRIFICIAL VESSEL
CHINESE, T'ANG PERIOD

A T'ANG SACRIFICIAL VESSEL.—Just as Japanese art is known in the mind of the general public only from eighteenth-century prints with very quaint but clever compositions and unexpected lines, so Chinese art conveys the idea of pagodas hung with bells, fantastic landscapes with blue rocks shaped like old sponges, and tall mountain peaks like obelisks, peopled by women in trousers with small, deformed feet, and men with abnormally tall, bald heads, long beards, and gowns, while all the furniture is charming but eminently breakable, generally crude pink, canary yellow, or bright blue in color. This is all very true if you look only at a Ch'ien Lung dinner plate, but the reality has many surprises in store.

China had its rococo period, like most art civilizations, and it is true that to a great

extent China gave France its Louis XV style or rococo but it was the outcome, the decline of a far greater and nobler art.

On the other hand, the oldest known Chinese art was equally quaint, though in a different way, based on the art of their prehistoric people, and very like what is still the style of decoration in the South Sea Islands. It is the style of Chou bronzes with grotesque masks of animals and conventional, heavy forms. Being an eminently conservative people and antiquarians to the backbone, the Chinese stuck to their ancient ornaments just as they treasured and reproduced their ancient bronzes.

But these were only the beginning and the end; in between lay the golden age, the classic period of Chinese art when they produced sculpture like our Gothic figures and paintings that rival those of the Italian pre-Raphaelites. Unfortunately that is the art about which we know least. It started with the Han in our Roman times, was at its best during the T'ang period, from 618-906, and lived through the Sung period. Short-lived it was perhaps, but in one thousand years great works were done, so fine that all the historians have tried with more or less success to explain the classic Greek or Roman influence.

I got myself disliked once by comparing a T'ang pottery horse's head to the famous heads of the Parthenon, but there was some truth in the heresy. For this reason I am glad that the Museum acquired the T'ang vessel reproduced here: it is of the simplest, purest form, perfectly unadorned except for the openwork foot and the collar of the cover, which acts like a foot when the cover is used as a cup. These are formed by a complicated pattern of intertwined snakes, charmingly designed and wonderfully cast, a kind of goldsmith's work that will be the joy of many art workers; at the same time the elaborate pattern is kept so simple that it does not detract in the least from the general classic simplicity of the piece. That time has spread a lovely patina over the whole certainly adds to the charm, but it was not needed; even when perfectly new and shining, this sacrificial vessel must have been a joy to the man of taste.

S. C. B. R.